

# TWO POEMS OF DISCOVERY: MIKLÓS RADNÓTI'S "HYMN TO THE NILE" AND "COLUMBUS"

EMERY GEORGE

Trenton, NJ,  
U.S.A.

## I. Two Poems, Four Sources

When in the spring of 1944 Miklós Radnóti received his copy of the 15 March issue of *Magyar Csillag* (Hungarian Star), in which his poem "Columbus" first appeared,<sup>1</sup> well might he have meditated on the almost three years that had elapsed since his first encounter with its source, Antal Szerb's translated edition of the explorer's ship log. Szerb's *Columbus uti naplója* (Columbus' Travel Journal) appeared with Officina Publishers, Budapest, in 1941, presumably during autumn of that year; in view of the mutual esteem that existed between literary historian and poet, there can be no doubt that Radnóti acquired a copy almost immediately. Twenty months later, he reacted to the volume in the form of a poem. The decisive moment of stimulation came on Sunday, 2 May 1943, when the Radnótis, under the officiating hand of the poet's former professor, the priest father Sándor Sik, were baptized in the Roman Catholic faith. Now was the time to turn to the achievement of Christopher Columbus, one of Radnóti's most unmistakably Catholic subjects. The completed poem dates from 1 June 1943. It does not seem too much to suggest that its opening line, which quotes the opener of the ship log, also sounds like the priest administering the Radnótis' baptismal sacrament: "*In Nomine Domini Nostri Jhesu Christi.*"<sup>2</sup>

Those twenty months of study, waiting, meditation, and writing stand at the opposite extreme from the often all but instantaneous reaction and speed with which Radnóti responds to an invitation to write an important poem.<sup>3</sup> One fine example of encounter with a source for a poem and nearly hair-trigger response to it is "Hymn to the Nile." As did "Columbus," the poem most probably had a double instigation: a "5,000-year-old" AEgyptian hymn, and (my discovery) a distinguished first translation into Hungarian of part of a book on the subject of the river Nile. The book in question is: Emil Ludwig, *Der Nil: Lebenslauf eines Stromes* (translated into English as *The Nile: The Life-Story of a River*).<sup>4</sup> Banned in Nazi Germany, Ludwig's book first appeared with Querido Verlag in Amsterdam: volume 1 (*Von der Quelle bis nach Aegypten*) in 1935; volume 2 (*Der Nil in Aegypten*) in 1937. Tibor Déry's translation of volume 1 appeared with Athenaeum

of Budapest, in what I take to be the first days of 1936;<sup>5</sup> volume 2 of Ludwig's work, in a translation by Endre Csánk, was also published by Athenaeum, very probably in the fall of 1937. Radnóti's verse adaptation of his "five-millennia-old" hymn, titled "A Nílus himnusza" ("Hymn of the Nile"), first saw print in the 31 January 1936 issue of the popular illustrated weekly *Ünnep* (Holiday). "Himnusz a Nílushoz" ("Hymn to the Nile"), the definitive version we know from Radnóti's sixth poetry collection, *Meredek út* (Steep Road) (1938), and from later editions of the poet's work, first appeared in the February 1937 issue of *Szép Szó* (Beautiful Word).<sup>6</sup>

I owe to Mariann Nagy's magisterial bibliography of Miklós Radnóti<sup>7</sup> my awareness that the early version "Hymn of the Nile" has had some scholarly attention before. Tibor Melczer, in a perceptive article in the 16 November 1984 issue of *Élet és Irodalom* (Life and Letters), titled "Egy elfelejtett Radnóti-átköltés" ("A Forgotten Radnóti Adaptation"),<sup>8</sup> identifies the source of the "Hymn of the Nile" prototype as occurring in a work by Adolf Erman, *Die Literatur der Aegypter* (The Literature of the Egyptians) (Leipzig, 1923).<sup>9</sup> In this volume, on pages 193–96, we indeed find a prose hymn titled "An den Nil," a text as passionate as it is diffuse, occupying almost four pages in print. It is not 5,000 years old but dates, rather, from the late Hyksos period, or, from the earlier half of the second millennium B. C. From this source text Radnóti takes what appeals to him, in the process rearranging and compressing his material. The opening "zöldelő" ("gleaming green"), for example, comes from a repetitive feature found at the end of the prose hymn.<sup>10</sup> There can be little doubt, then, as to Radnóti's first source. One recalls that the poet, during his university days at Szeged, similarly adapted an African fire hymn, taken from the *Anthologie Nègre* of Blaise Cendrars.<sup>11</sup> Melczer is also right in pointing to how the definitive "Hymn to the Nile" is no longer adaptation, but rather "to the very roots of its being" a poem by Radnóti. This, to quote the article, is underscored by its "dynamic verbs, reveling participles, and indeed thinly veiled political sentiments."

So far, Melczer and I agree. We part ways where he makes no mention of the possibility that Radnóti may also be directly indebted to volume 1 of Ludwig's book, in the translation by Tibor Déry.<sup>12</sup> I hold this to be not only possible, but also highly probable, for two reasons. First, there is the matter of timing. A friend or editor – or both – may have called Radnóti's attention to Erman's 1923 compilation, whether weeks or years preceding the adaptation, it is not yet possible to determine. As it looks, it took the stimulation of a second, more recent, source, namely, Ludwig's account, to revitalise the poet's interest in the ancient hymn text. That less than a month should elapse between the appearance of the Déry translation and of Radnóti's "Hymn of the Nile" adaptation, is highly suggestive. My second reason has to do with language. Every one of the principal ideas underlying lexicon in either version by Radnóti: green, distant plain, flooding, cattle herds, crowding, tightness, pastureland, irrigation, loaded trees, wandering poor,

billowing waves, generous crop, teeming fish, desert, serpent, fruit, moon, sun — every one of these is attested in one form or another in Ludwig's book in its entirety.<sup>13</sup>

It is almost as if Ludwig himself were acquainted with Erman's anthology, and with ancient hymn, and while this is by no means precluded, I have no data on it. What we do know is that Radnóti could not have seen volume 2 of Ludwig's book, either in the original or in the Csánk translation, in time to profit from it in composing "Hymn to the Nile." He himself may afterwards have marvelled at the similarities in language between poem and book. As to a "trigger" for writing the definitive version, either in fall or late winter of 1936, it could have been a publisher's advertisement for the forthcoming volume 2.<sup>14</sup> In any case, the poet's demonstrable debt to Ludwig seems as strong as it is to Szerb's edition of Columbus' travel log. We keep in mind, of course, that Szerb's work occupies the status of a first source,<sup>15</sup> corresponding to Erman, while Ludwig's role in triggering "Hymn of the Nile," being its immediate occasion, parallels the Radnóti's baptismal rite, the event that directly led to the writing of "Columbus."

## II. Discovery with a Difference

Miklós Radnóti was given seventeen years — from 1928 to 1944 — to unfold as an artist. "Hymn to the Nile," coming in the middle of his career, and "Columbus," coming near its end, are both works of Radnóti's poetic maturity. Their double backgrounds look superficially similar, yet they differ substantially, in that the more recent stimuli differ. As was Erman's anthology, Ludwig's book is again a literary source, a text found from without. Its occasional nature is basic. The Radnóti's baptismal rite, on the other hand, differs radically from Szerb's book, or indeed from any book publication; it is an inner source. Its text may be the published text of the Communion Service; its subtext is a variety of religious experience to which Radnóti felt attracted since student days. As the immediate stimulus, so the product. "Hymn to the Nile" is an important occasional work, while "Columbus" is a poem of self-discovery. The former reflects Radnóti's interest in the outside world; the latter is the poet's personal ship log of his inner journey to his own, ultimate, island of San Salvador.

Comparison will illumine this important difference between two of Radnóti's key exoticist poems. Melczer is right in perceiving a kinship between "Hymn to the Nile" and works showing the poet's exoticist interests of younger days. In particular the image, in lines 10–12, of the beggar gleaning "from trees that, loaded, sink / deep down to earth" conjures the world of Radnóti's earlier narrative poem "Song of the Black Man Who Went to Town" (*CW*).<sup>16</sup> There is, further, the paean to the sun ("Hymn to the Nile," lines 6 "blind with light" and 25 "In bursting sun and flame"), to remind us of the "Hymn to the Sun" section of

"Sunday in Summertime" (*NM*); and the images of poverty in the Nile poetry take us back to youthful poems of the early 1930s nourished, not last, by Radnóti's experience in Paris of the *Exposition Coloniale Mondiale*.<sup>17</sup> The feeling of simultaneous closeness and distance, to and from the terrain and the people who depend on it for their sustenance, is not the least exoticist element in the Nile hymn's evidently gratefully received subject.

Terrain, sun, poverty, and sustenance are all important concerns for the poet to return to, after an absence from them of well over a year.<sup>18</sup> Yet the one overriding feature of the invitation to address the Nile that could not have escaped the poet is that it is once again a chance to write of a great river. *The hymn to the green-gleaming Nile* takes its worthy place among the good dozen poems by Miklós Radnóti that work with the river motif. There are the uncollected "On the Banks of the Danube" and "The Danube Calls" (*UPI*); from among the Reichenberg poetry, there are "Landscapes," numbers 1 and 2 (titled, respectively, "*Dusk on the Riverbank*" and "*Dusk on the Bank and the Tugboat Cries*") (also *UPI*); in published collections, we find "7 July 1932" (from the *Male Diary* cycle, in *CW*); "Sunday in Summertime," "Punctual Poem about Dusk" (both *NM*); and "On the Riverbank" (*WoC*). These eight poems precede "Hymn to the Nile"; later in *Steep Road*, we also find "Elegy on the Death of Gyula Juhász" and "Twenty-Nine Years."<sup>19</sup>

Some of these river poems show distance from and closeness to "Hymn to the Nile" itself. "Punctual Poem about Dusk" is simply a lyric treating the river Tisza (lines 5–6 "Evening arrives; the river Tisza / just laps along with a giant raft, ..."); later, in "Elegy on the Death of Gyula Juhász," direct treatment matures into the use of lyric irrelevance, as in folk song, and of metaphor: "It's spring, and the Tisza, bright and deep, / flows on, and your farmsteads' dull / poverty rolls on flooding; ..."<sup>20</sup> This is already close to the conception of the secret alliance between rolling and flooding river and the poor it nourishes, as celebrated in the Nile opus. But no two poems in Radnóti's entire river oeuvre stand closer to "Hymn to the Nile" than "Sunday in Summertime" and "Twenty-Nine Years." We observe that the former, a poetic record of a student outing from Szeged days, once again has at its center the river Tisza; and that the latter does not name any specific river. Despite this, I submit that "Sunday in Summertime" in effect heralds the Nile writing, while "Twenty-Nine Years" equally effectively looks back on it.

In the "*Hymn to the Sun*" section of "Sunday in Summertime," among many other epithets for the sun, we come upon line 6 "Southern hissing of rivers." For its source, we go back to the poetry of Blaise Cendrars. To quote my critical study of Radnóti's poetry, that telling epithet "evokes the river poetry of *Documentaires*, especially of 'Fleuve.' The 'Le Bahr el-Zeraf' of the explanatory rubric heading it, ..., is a tributary of the White Nile, in southern Sudan."<sup>21</sup> We are in the presence of some of the best of Radnóti's early exoticist readings. Yet even this

specific early allusion does not compare for resonance with that at the close of "Twenty-Nine Years," where the poet, after lengthy contemplation of his own life and oncoming fate, draws without warning on the river motif as a metaphor for the life of an individual. The concluding stanza reads:

The butterfly must die; see, it's heaven's light  
that goes its wandering way through time;  
great rivers keep flowing dreaming on,  
at their deltas, marsh-mud; with crested foam,  
waters dream; and where marsh-reeds mingle  
thickly and sway in the light, there rises  
toward the sun a rose-colored flamingo.<sup>22</sup>

In the Foreword to volume 1 of his Nile book, Emil Ludwig writes: "Every time I have written the life of a man, there has hovered before my mind's eye the image, physical and spiritual, of a river, ..."<sup>23</sup> And while there is no reason to overrate Ludwig as a writer, there can be no doubt that this cultivated German read his river poets, Goethe and Hölderlin in particular. Working with the metaphor of the river as a way to treat the lives of extraordinary humans is precisely Hölderlin's enterprise, for example, in his Pindaric hymn on the river Rhine.<sup>24</sup> And while Radnóti does not, besides the river god himself, celebrate or address specific personages, his subject in "Hymn to the Nile" is above all the inseparability of the river and its good works from the human lives and spirits it nourishes.

In "Hymn to the Nile" Radnóti looks for and finds the river as the focus of his flaming act of praise; in "Columbus" he is at sea, looks for land, and — finds himself. My question is how this works, beyond the status of the poem "Columbus" as largely direct treatment of a worthy historical subject. I have written on both mimesis and form in "Columbus" before;<sup>25</sup> here, let me attempt an interpretation that illumines the poem as an allegory of the poet's own sense of direction and of his hope for innermost exploration and discovery. What I am about to suggest does not negate the mimetic or the historical dimension in any way; I am hoping to add to our understanding of how the poem functions, as seen from the poet's personal vantage point.

The very opener of "Columbus" is tellingly and deeply personal: "*In Nomine Domini Nostri Jhesu Christi*— / That's how he once began." We need but think of Radnóti's poems of early years, with their explicitly Christian iconography, of such pieces as "Meditation" (*PS*), "Portrait," "Mary," and "Fall Berries Ripen in the Sun Now" (all *SMS*),<sup>26</sup> and of how the feelings they formatively express has stayed with him. Going on, let us compare line 2 "No time now for his diary" with the poet's first diary entry for the year 1942: "I have no time to take notes."<sup>27</sup> Indeed, by the time of the writing of "Columbus," there is no diary; the last

known entry is dated 14 March 1943, the day before the date we find under "Fourth Eclogue."<sup>28</sup> Line of "Columbus" opens with: "Wind turns the pages." The personal import of these words is clearly overheard in Radnóti's diary entry for 10 April 1941: "If I really still have work to do here, then I cannot perish. And if I perish, then there was no sense in my being alive to begin with."<sup>29</sup> Similar moments of self-doubt and despondency about the fate of the work are expressed elsewhere in the mature poetry, as, for example, in "Rain Falls. It Dries ...": "What else, in this poem? Shall I maybe let it drift / as does an undressing plane tree its ancient leaf? // They'll forget as it is. Nothing really helps."<sup>30</sup>

"Wind turns the pages. He leaves it, has other thoughts" (line 3), but not for long. Let us listen to line 4: "above him purrs a wild, taut sky with giant claws." Here, Radnóti splits up a single, dominating, image into two centrally personal images. Wild, taut skies are a metaphor for tense times, as elsewhere in Radnóti's poetry; the very title poem of his posthumous collection, "Sky with Clouds," treats its central metaphor personally: "The moon rocks on a sky with clouds, / I'm amazed at being alive." To this collusion of image with feeling the poet then adds, in "Columbus," the conceit of the sky as a gigantic cat. We must go back to the African tale "Why Does the Ape Live in a Tree?," which Radnóti included in his anthology *Karunga, a holtak ura* (Karunga, Lord of the Dead) (1944). Here is cast the "symbolic role of the wildcat that is hard to miss. To escape the 'wildcats,' the murders rampant across the scene on which the poet must live and work, may be a considerable project."<sup>31</sup> How considerable, I illustrate by drawing a parallel between the African tale and the late poem "In a Clamorous Palm Tree." At its close, the poet expresses his hope that in time he too might "be granted that mercy — / a kindly death."<sup>32</sup> In "Columbus," that time has not yet come; here, the sky, a wildcat, does no more than threaten. So do human presences: "in the night / four mutineers sit crouched at bases of the masts" (lines 5–6); so do moments of doubt in Columbus as to whether he is being rightly advised: "Could Rodrigo be wrong? Perhaps. ... Frog in his throat" (line 8).

Just who are those "four mutineers"? In the poet's soul, they are: laziness, neglect of the work, doubts about his own sanity, the temptation to despair. They are the poet's very own Four Horseman of the Apocalypse, and each of these fears can be heard or overheard in the late poetry. Doubts about his sanity are a palpable concern, for example, in "Perhaps..." and in "The Terrible Angel."<sup>33</sup> But the end is not yet; it cannot be: "Columbus, legs apart, stands firm" (line 5); he hears: "the many sails hum one note" (line 7). They hum: "Get back to work!"; to quote the close of "Peace: A Hymn": "spirit, don't cease — hold out, defend!"<sup>34</sup> And Columbus does hold out; he continues questioning and thinking (lines 9–11): "But don't the tufts of grass point to approaching land? / and I saw them myself: a flock of birds flew west, / and yesterday, a dove."

Columbus-Radnóti, the explorer-poet, has had indications, both of being tested and of grace. In the latter category belong those birds who flew west. I

read them as being none other than Radnóti's many translations attending to Western poetry, appearing in one anthology after another.<sup>35</sup> And "yesterday," like Noah, the explorer-poet saw his "dove." Besides the biblical reference, the image bears two interpretations. One is that the "dove" is the divine peace offering of the poet's recent baptismal rite. As a promise that the work will not perish, this, to be sure, has its limitations. Far more convincing seems the second reading I am thinking of, namely, that the word *dove* itself is the divine sign, for, of course, the name Columbus means dove. In a similar fashion, victory — *nike* — is inscribed on the name Miklós — Nicholas. Both Columbus and Radnóti were to emerge victorious. The poet would die, but his work would not. And Columbus' own indications would come to precisely that message. Mutineers, sky, bad councilors may threaten, but in time they withdraw. The explorer reaches port, as does the poet himself. "*Laudetur*" — they murmured and stood, hats in hand."

As shown by the death motif, which recurs throughout Radnóti's late poetry,<sup>36</sup> all of his late imagery is brought to bear on his personal condition, and on his ultimate concerns. The last-named are treated in rhetorical modes ranging from the literal to the allegorical. Other examples of outright allegory in the oeuvre will be found in the similes of "Like a Bull" (*NM*), and in the striking tree metaphors of "First Eclogue" (*SR*) and of the Bor poem "Root."<sup>37</sup> There is also support for the contrast between our two poems; each has its close contrary at the level of the opposition we have looked at. Impersonal "Hymn to the Nile" stands eloquently opposed to the closing seven lines of "Twenty-Nine Years," while deeply personally attuned "Columbus" comes fairly equipped with its impersonal double. "Youth," which bears the date 29 May 1943, is another Columbus poem, but of a very different orientation, carrying as it does a point of strictly historical interest.<sup>38</sup>

### III. Form as a Carrier of Meaning

"Hymn to the Nile" is a slender hymn; "Columbus" is a modified, innovative sonnet. The first interesting formal feature of the Nile opus is that Radnóti did not settle on the slender hymnic form right away. Very probably guided by cadences in the German prose text "An den Nil," he chose for "Hymn to the Nile" a loose iambic line of for the most part four beats, the material arranged in five four-line stanzas. And while the results have a certain ring when compared with the original prose text alone, the particular for his prototype took evidently did not satisfy the poet. Its form tells us that "Hymn to the Nile" was not simply to be another poem about a river. It was to be about an African river, to emerge, on being refashioned into "Hymn to the Nile," out of the slender African hymnic opus, out of tribal song and adaptation.<sup>39</sup> This much undoubtedly guided Radnóti, as in mimesis he overheard formal suggestions. Listening to his prose source

and adaptation together, he was encouraged by the softly drumming beat, of about three iambs per line, of such material in front of the adaptation as: "O Nile, you gleam green," and: "Under earth you are born." Slender and hymnic as "Hymn to the Nile" is with reference to where it properly belongs genetically, so unique is it in conception and particular execution. The performing solo praise of the voice of "Hymn to the Nile" heralds a great stream, the poem's tones changing as the land changes, addressing its subject, "who gently murmur; in turn / break angry; out to farm / your waters run! // Full moon is all your praise, /and praise, the sun!"<sup>40</sup> Subject and form are fulfilled together.

If Radnóti had a clear feeling as to where "Hymn to the Nile" belongs in a mature oeuvre that is always under formal control, he certainly had such a feeling with regard to "Columbus." For this late, and intimately personal, realization is not merely a Renaissance document; it is itself a rebirth. Born of a late fifteenth-century text – the log of Columbus' first Atlantic crossing – it shall bear upon its mimetic substance the unmistakable sign of its formal becoming. "Columbus" is an innovative mannerist-baroque sonnet, baroque certainly by virtue of its powerful alexandrine cadences, sonnet because of its fine articulation, however much the latter may seem to set form and meaning in opposition.

Unlike the slender hymn, the sonnet is a relative newcomer in Radnóti's oeuvre. There are ten restless examples, from section 3 of "War Diary" (*WoC*) through "O Peace of Ancient Prisons" (*SwC*).<sup>41</sup> One of the most audibly sonnet-like of these is "Into a Copy of Steep Road" (*SwC*), with only one line of the second tercet missing; perhaps the least audible is the garland of sonnets in "Twenty-Nine Years." Somewhere in the middle stands the bemusingly off-center sonnet structure of "Columbus." That it has simultaneous Petrarchan and Shakespearean resolutions, we have noted before.<sup>42</sup> Here I would like to add that the puzzle of the tercet, lines 5–7, as preceded by a perfectly convincing opening quatrain and followed by the innovative quatrain, lines 8–11, is not an unsolvable one. To attempt a brief demonstration in the psychology of perception: let us make line 8 the closing line of the second stanza. No – this does not work; line 8 – and this is a structural secret of "Columbus" – is not what we perceive it to be. Line 8 is a great pause after line 7 "the great ship pitches, rolls; the many sails hum one note"; it is a moment of silence preceding Columbus' expression of doubt in what is now line 9: "Could Rodrigo be wrong? Perhaps. ... Frog in his throat." If then we read this as the opening line of the first tercet, the rest falls into place; line 12, with its contrasting images of dove and land, breaks as a line of dramatic exchange breaks. Going back and accepting what the poet has done at face value, we may also say that the poem's progression, its dramatic tension and resolution, are beautifully served by the (4 + 3 + 4 + 3) groupings of lines. In addition the idea of innovative sonnet form is precisely that the disparity between what we expect and what we encounter should encourage us to think of alternate resolu-



tions. In this ongoing formal quandary, Radnóti's Apollinairian penchant for mystification is productively felt.

Different as "Hymn to the Nile" and "Columbus" are, they both deeply weave themselves into the major œuvre; in reconciliation and affinity, they are poems of travel. As Radnóti, in this 1934 Szeged essay on postwar French exoticism observed of Blaise Cendrars, André Gide, and other writers, the author of that school composition was himself and exoticist, hence a traveler.<sup>43</sup> This does not mean to imply that Miklós Radnóti did not long for the "peace of ancient prisons," that is, for the peace and security of home, where, the fates granting, he might for a time continue working undisturbed.<sup>44</sup> But, if we trust the testimony of the poems, to the end of his life Radnóti remained in spirit a traveler, an explorer. His final note on this he sounds in "Eighth Eclogue," where the prophet Nahum suggests that he and his companions seek the kingdom of God by setting out on a journey.

#### Notes

1. *Magyar Csillag* 4, no. 6 (15 March 1944): 329. For timely assistance with materials and data used in the preparation of this paper, grateful thanks are due to the National Széchényi Library, the Metropolitan Ervin Szabó Library, The University of Michigan Graduate Library, The New York Public Library, and Princeton University Library. In a somewhat different form, the present paper was read at the Miklós Radnóti Memorial Conference, held at Darwin College, University of Cambridge, on 4–6 December 1994. For his kind invitation and assistance, I here thank the organizer and chairman of the conference, Dr. George Gömöri.
2. On Antal Szerb's edited translation as the source of the poem "Columbus," see Miklós Radnóti, *The Complete Poetry*, ed. and trans. Emery George (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1980), 386–87. Cited below as *MR* and page. On the Radnóti's conversion, see Emery George, *The Poetry of Miklós Radnóti: A Comparative Study* (New York: Karz-Cohl, 1986), 210, 621 (ch. 9, n. 21). Cited as *PMR* and page. On two other preeminently Catholic subjects for poetic treatment, see the discussion on Radnóti's translation of the "Elegie" of Walther von der Vogelweide (*PMR*, 208–10), and on Radnóti's poem in memory of Mihály Babits, "Only Skin and Bones and Pain" (*PMR*, 274, 452–54).
3. From among numerous examples for this, see especially "Garden on Istenhegy," the opening poem of the collection *Walk On, Condemned!* (1936) (*MR*, 145). The poem bears the date 20 July 1936, the day on which the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War was announced over Radio Granada (see *PMR*, 419, 674 [ch. 16, n. 12]). Radnóti probably read or heard of the event in the afternoon, and wrote the poem in the evening. It seems safe to say that most of the requiem poems, with the notable exceptions of "First" and "Fifth" Eclogues, belong in this category as well.
4. Trans. Mary H. Lindsay (New York: Viking, 1937). This American translation is cited as Ludwig and page.

5. Having presumably missed the Christmas book market of the year before. Information kindly provided by the Reference Department, National Széchényi Library.
6. For the citations to *Ünnep* and *Steep Road*, see *MR*, 375 (n. on "Hymn to the Nile"). The full citation for the first appearance of "Hymn to the Nile" is: *Szép Szó* 4, no. 1 [issue 11] (February 1937): 16–17.
7. *Radnóti Miklós, Bibliográfia*, összehasonlított Nagy Mariann (M. R., Bibliography, comp. M. N.), A Petőfi Irodalmi Múzeum Bibliográfiai Füzetei, XX. századi Magyar Írók Bibliográfiai (Bibliographic Brochures of the Petőfi Literary Museum, Bibliographies of Twentieth-Century Hungarian Writers) (Budapest: Petőfi Irodalmi Múzeum, 1989). Cited as Nagy, entry number, and page.
8. No. 46, 6, with the Hungarian text of the adaptation "Hymn to the Nile" reprinted immediately following the article. See Nagy, entries 317 (81: text of adaptation), 1906 (320: Melczer's article).
9. See Adolf Erman [ed.], *Die Literatur der Aegypter: Gedichte, Erzählungen und Lehrbücher aus dem 3. und 2. Jahrtausend v. Chr.* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1923). Available in English as: Adolf Erman, *The Ancient Egyptians: A Sourcebook of Their Writings*, trans. Aylward M. Blackman (London: Methuen, 1927; New York: Harper & Row, Harper Torchbooks, 1966). In the Harper Torchbooks edition, "Hymn to the Nile" appears on 146–49.
10. German text, 196; English, 149.
11. For the adaptation only, see *MR*, 129; it bears the date November 1933, For both original tribal song text and adaptation, see *PMR*, 141–42.
12. There is here a real break in the translation history of Ludwig's work; Déry may have declined an assignment to render volume 2 as well. On the poor relations that had existed between Déry and Athenaeum since the late 1920s, see István Kiss, *Az Athenaeum Könyvkiadó története és szerepe a magyar irodalomban* (The History and Role of Athenaeum Publishers in Hungarian Literature), *Irodalomtörténeti Könyvtár* (Library of Literary History), 35 (Budapest: Akadémiai, 1980), 181.
13. We are here comparing, of course, the language of two translations: that of Lindsay (cited as Ludwig, see above, n. 4) with my version of a poem by Radnóti. In the following list, page numbers higher than 312 cite the equivalent of volume 2 of the Amsterdam edition. First or early occurrences, Ludwig: 3, 313, 333 (green); 6, 7, 313, 331 ([distant] plain); 313, 317, 331 (flooding); 59, 167, 318 ([cattle] herds); 315, 331 (crowding); 319 (tightness); 59, 166, 173, 176 (pastureland); 319, 330 (irrigation); 8, 9, 168 ([loaded] trees); 319, 337 ([wandering] poor); 5, 15, 271, 313 ([billowing] waves); 173, 313, 330 ([generous] crop); 15, 163 ([teeming] fish); 7, 313 (desert); 321 (serpent [motif]); 3, 4, 8, 9, 168 ([golden] fruit); 5, 163, 313 (moon [, and] sun [separately or together]). Two examples for passages that may also have assisted Radnóti in his imagery; "The Nile silt contains gold" (283); "the desert ... grows fruitful" (285). His figure "5,000" for the age of his prototype may well come from what Ludwig writes of the baobab: "Some botanists assert that trees of this kind are five thousand years old" (168).
14. Despite the tight publication schedule for volume 2 of Ludwig's book (with a date line of July 1936 and probable appearance date in early spring of 1937), a Hungarian translation could have been ready for advertising in time for the 1936 winter book market.

15. There are verbal carry-overs from Szerb's edition to Radnóti's poem; see *MR*, 387. Quite discrete of each other, Szerb and Radnóti may also have been indebted to: János Nepomuk Danielik, *Columbus; vagy Amerika fölfedezése* (Columbus; or, the Discovery of America) (Pest: Szent-István Társulat [Society of Saint Stephen], 1856). Danielik's narrated version of the events of 11–12 October will be found on 112–15. It is of considerable interest that Radnóti first learned of Danielik's book during Béla Zolnai's lectures at Szeged. For this information, thanks are due to Professor Mihály Szegedy-Maszák, Eötvös University, Budapest, and Indiana University, Bloomington.
16. "(CW)" intends Radnóti's third published poetry collection, *Convalescent Wind*. Similar abbreviations below follow the list in *PMR*, 555.
17. On the Paris *Exposition*, see *PMR*, 132–34; also *MR*, 18–19 ("Introduction"). The particular poems I have in mind, besides "Song of the Black Man Who Went to Town," will be found in *UP2* (in particular the texts in *MR*, 311–27).
18. That is, since "Hymn" and "An Eskimo Thinks of Death" (*MR*, 148, 156), both in *WoC*, both bearing the date 1935. "Hymn" appeared in the 1 July 1935 issue of *Nyugat* (Occident); "An Eskimo Thinks of Death," in the March 1936 issue of *Válasz* (Reply). It is here assumed that Radnóti did not complete "Hymn to the Nile" before late autumn of 1936.
19. These ten river poems will be found translated in *MR*, 281, 282, 285, 285, 105, 130–31, 133, 162, 190, and 198–99.
20. Lines 15–17 (*MR*, 190).
21. See *PMR*, 143.
22. Lines 50–56 (*MR*, 199). There is a close resemblance between these lines and the opening paragraph of Ludwig's concluding chapter (ch. 31) in volume 2. Let me quote only the first two sentences: "Above the dome of the exchange, slanting up from Rosetta, a flock of flamingos whirs south-west, for on Lake Mareotis, in the marshes at the mouth of the Nile, they will find thousands of their kind. Coloured like a sunset, their slender necks hidden in their wings, they stand on one leg on the shores of the lake, looking over at the cranes which have just alighted by the water in beautiful curves from their flight to the stubble fields" (Ludwig, 601). As does Radnóti's stanza, Ludwig's paragraph too closes on the image of a bird rising toward the sun. This suggests that Radnóti did buy the Csánk volume, and made use of the text in some of his later poetry.
23. Ludwig, vii ("Foreword"). The remainder of that opening sentence: "but only once have I beheld in a river the image of man and his fate," stresses the Faustian – social and universal – point that Ludwig makes in his opening paragraph (in connection with the author's having for the first time seen the Great Dam at Aswan, the experience that provided the impetus for writing the book).
24. See Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke, Grosse Stuttgarter Ausgabe*, ed. Friedrich Beissner and Adolf Beck, 8 vols. in 15 (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, J. G. Cotta'sche Buchhandlung Nachfolger, 1943–1985), 2:1:142–48 (text), 2:2:730–38 (commentary). Proof of Ludwig's own interest in the secret nexus between the river and individual lives as here argued is provided by the fact that on the half title page of his book 4 ("Der bezwungene Strom"), which opens volume 2 of the Amsterdam edition, he quotes six lines from Goethe's early free-verse hymn "Mahomets-Gesang." Goethe's poem celebrates an envisioned parallel between the course of a river and the life of the prophet Muhammad. On

- the pertinent point of influence, hymn to hymn, see Eudo C. Mason, *Hölderlin and Goethe*, ed. P. H. Gaskill, *British and Irish Studies in German Language and Literature*, 3 (Berne, Frankfurt am Main: Herbert Lang, 1975), 31–32.
25. See *PMR*, 41–42 (mimesis), 467–68 (form). See also Emery George, “The Image of America in Miklós Radnóti’s Poetry,” *Cross Currents; A Yearbook of Central European Culture*, ed. Ladislav Matejka (Ann Arbor: Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures, The University of Michigan, 1983), 347–61; 357–59, and nn. 28–29.
  26. See *MR*, 63, 88, 88, 92. To this list could be added “Elegy, or Icon, Nailless” (*SMS*) (*MR*, 84).
  27. See Miklós Radnóti, *Napló* (Diary), ed. Mrs. Miklós Radnóti, Tibor Melczer, and Magdolna Sz. Székely (Budapest: Magvető, 1989), 203 (entry for 26 January).
  28. See *Napló*, 280. For the date under “Fourth Eclogue,” see *MR*, 249. Radnóti wrote the poem on one of his tours of forced labor; see Melczer’s commentary, *Napló*, 384.
  29. *Napló*, 158.
  30. *MR*, 227.
  31. See *PMR*, 130. The translated text of the tale “Why Does the Ape Live in a Tree?” will be found there also.
  32. *MR*, 263; discussion, *PMR*, 130.
  33. See *MR*, 223 (“Perhaps ...,” with its brave “Palinode”), 252 (“The Terrible Angel”). Exemplified, further, are laziness (“War Diary,” section 3 [*MR*, 159]), concern about neglect of the poet’s work by others (“In a Restless Hour,” “Rain Falls. It Dries. ...,” “Not Memory, Nor Magic” [*MR*, 213, 227, 264]), and the temptation to despair, also eloquently illustrated by the three poems just cited. We should add the one qualification that in the first and third, there also occurs a comely reaffirmation of faith in the survival of the poet’s voice and achievement.
  34. *MR*, 195.
  35. For lists of citations of Radnóti’s many anthology projects, see *PMR*, ch. 7 (154–56) and Bibliography (740–42). Especially the 1941 entries of *Napló* are replete with references to work on the 1941 *Love Poems* (156–89).
  36. See Zsuzsa Bíró, “A halálmotívum Radnóti költészetének utolsó korszakában (*Tajtékos ég*)” (“The Death Motif in the Final Period of Radnóti’s Poetry [*Sky with Clouds*]”), *Irodalomtörténeti Közlemények* (Papers in Literary History) 82, no. 3 (1978): 345–53.
  37. See *MR*, 121 (“Like a Bull”), 196–97 (“First Eclogue”), 271 (“Root”).
  38. Text, *MR*, 251; see also note, 387.
  39. See *PMR*, ch. 6 (137–49). Here I must gently disagree with Melczer, in the point he makes in his article in *Élet és Irodalom* that Radnóti did not read the Nile as a specifically African river. The form in which the poet expresses his experience shows that Radnóti’s Nile is indeed African.
  40. I stand by my earlier statement on the horn music of this poem (see *MR*, 375).
  41. See the list in *PMR*, 467.
  42. See *PMR*, 468.
  43. See the quotations from Radnóti’s essay, *PMR*, ch. 5 (101–02).
  44. “Prison” as a metaphor for home is all the more fitting in the late Radnóti’s case; as Ábel Köszegi writes: “Since 4 April 1944 he has not stirred from his apartment. He will not wear the yellow star” (*Töredék: Radnóti Miklós utolsó hónapjainak krónikája* [Fragment:

Chronicle of M. R.'s Final Months]), *Mikrokozmosz Füzetek* (M. Pamphlets) (Budapest: Szépirodalmi, 1972), 9. Notable is the fact that "In a Clamorous Palm Tree," that last, Rousseauian, gesture of withdrawal from "civilization," bears the date 5 April 1944.

Miklós Radnóti

HYMN OF THE NILE

(After a 5000-year-old poem)

O Nile, you gleam green, you green-gleaming one!  
 O Nile, praises to you!  
 Under earth you are born and from earth you break forth,  
 and nourish Egypt.

Ra created your billowing waves  
 that he may water gently bellowing cattle,  
 that he may water the desert, which burns  
 and, far from the waters, keeps swallowing hot.

You sprinkle creation and shield it till harvest time,  
 onto our large platters you bring opulent foods;  
 billowing goodness you are, and pulsing strength,  
 o large-eyed, sweetly fragrant one, you!

For crowding herds it is you who water grasses,  
 on your grasses the beast fattens for the sacrifice,  
 you tighten granaries, stuff sheds stuffed,  
 and it is you who nurse the poor on the banks.

O Nile, bringer of gold-gleaming fruits,  
 under earth you are born and from earth you break forth,  
 large-eyed serpent, sweetly fragrant one,  
 o, winged praises to you, you, who gleam green!

Translated from the Hungarian  
 by Emery George

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